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Gauthier MF, McIntyre R, Shiel T. (2019). Professional Skills for the Modern Student: How Librarians Developed and Taught a New Elective Course for Medical and Dental Students. NAHSL Conference Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.13028/83hg-4f26>. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/nahsl-proceedings/2018/proceedings/1>

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PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR THE MODERN STUDENT: HOW LIBRARIANS DEVELOPED AND TAUGHT A NEW ELECTIVE COURSE FOR MEDICAL AND DENTAL STUDENTS: LIGHTNING PRESENTATION

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North Atlantic Health Sciences Libraries Annual Meeting
October 28-30, 2018
Manchester, New Hampshire, USA

ABSTRACT

In the Fall of 2017, a group of librarians at the UConn Health Sciences Library were exploring new instruction opportunities and decided to offer an elective on professional skills for first and second year medical and dental students. Our objectives were to become more involved with the Medical School's curriculum, make more connections with students and faculty, and to represent the library and librarians in a new way. Our planning and ideas became "Marketing You," a one-week, five-day course that taught students professional social media management strategies, how to write cover letters and resumes, how to design presentations and posters, and public speaking. Each session was two hours long and covered one professional topic with pre-class readings and media, in-class activities, discussion, and real-life examples. Students gave 10 minute presentations on the final day about what they learned over the week and what changes they made to their existing social media accounts, resumes, posters, or presentations. The course was taught in February-March 2018 and received great reviews and feedback from the six students who took the class. All students who took the post-class assessment rated it as being educationally beneficial, found the course content helpful, and enjoyed working with librarians. We benefited from the experience of honing our teaching skills, developing curricular materials, and learning more about the various course topics. We plan to offer Marketing You again in February 2019.

INTRODUCTION

A group of librarians at the University of Connecticut Health Sciences Library in Farmington, CT, were tasked with finding new instruction opportunities in the Fall of 2017. Our objectives were to become more involved in the School of Medicine's and School of Dental Medicine's curriculum, make more connections to students and faculty, and represent both librarians and the library in novel ways. We identified a potential part of the curriculum where our new instruction could fit: the Learning Enhancement Assessment Period.¹ During this two-week block, first- and second-year medical and dental students are encouraged to take week-long elective courses known as Individualized Learning Opportunities (ILOs).¹ ILO topics vary and can be on academic topics (like medical specialties or research methods) or more creative, introspective, or personal pursuits (self-care, mindfulness, or meditation). We decided to design and teach an ILO.

We began brainstorming potential topics for classes and thought about what skills librarians could offer. There are other opportunities in the curriculum where students meet with librarians to go over skills relating to information literacy, searching the literature, and using evidence-based resources, so we didn't want to replicate those lessons. Instead, we thought about what students were expected to know but weren't necessarily taught, which we identified as traditional professional skills like public speaking and writing cover letters and either resumes or curricula vitae (CVs). Students might also never be instructed in more modern professional skills like maintaining and curating one's online presence and designing research posters and presentations. We consulted with colleagues from other libraries (namely Gary Atwood from the University of Vermont and Donna Belcinski from Greenwich Hospital) who have taught these topics in the

past and were willing to share their materials and experiences. After weeks of planning, preparing, and researching the content, we submitted a proposal for a week-long elective called “Marketing You.” Our class was accepted with great enthusiasm from the approving faculty members.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

“Marketing You” was taught February 26- March 2, 2018. Each day included a two hour class and one hour of pre-class readings or audio-visual materials. The classes incorporated real-life examples, activities, and discussion. For a final project, students were asked to create a 10 minute presentation on what they learned during the week to be presented on the last day. Six students signed up for the course: three were from the School of Medicine and three were from the School of Dental Medicine.

The first day was titled “Marketing Yourself Online” and focused on evaluating one’s online presence (and whether it could be perceived as professional or not), what to include in a professional online profile, and how to create a professional online profile. Students began with searching for variations of their name and affiliations in various search engines. We discussed the types of results they were seeing and what kind of impression that might make to their future patients. We also taught them more advanced searching techniques like Boolean operators and restricting results to specific domains. This led to a discussion of what’s appropriate for a professional online presence and how they can control the privacy settings in various social media outlets to limit the amount of publicly available personal information and content. The students then either created or updated a LinkedIn² account, and we introduced the students to other professional networks (ORCiD,³ Mendeley,⁴ Doximity,⁵ Pivot,⁶ and SciENcv⁷).

The second day was titled “Marketing Yourself on a Screen.” Students began by learning about the basics of design like color, space, balance, and contrast. They then utilized those basics in evaluating existing research posters and creating their own using Canva.⁸

The third day was “Marketing Yourself on Paper.” Students learned about writing resumes, CVs, and cover letters by evaluating either de-identified or anonymous application materials. Students pretended to be on a hiring committee and had to decide within small groups which of the candidates to bring in for interviews. We also discussed potential biases of hiring committees and what the students can or cannot do to combat implicit judgements.

The fourth day was “Marketing Yourself in Person” and required the students practice public speaking multiple times. The students had to stand up in front of the class several times and speak for two minutes on various prompts (introducing themselves, telling a story, or pitching an idea). These exercises were inspired by techniques used in the Dale Carnegie Method.⁹ We also discussed strategies for giving talks during poster presentations, giving longer presentations, preparing for interviews, and becoming comfortable with public speaking.

Lastly, the fifth day, “Market Yourself Right Now,” gave the students the chance to present their final projects (a 10 minute presentation on what they learned during the week). Four of the six students chose to do a slideshow presentation of an overview of what they learned each day and what changes they made to their online identity, social media privacy settings, and resumes. One student gave an elevator pitch for a clothing company while demonstrating the resources and skills he learned over the week. The remaining student didn’t prepare a presentation, but instead did a live overview and demonstration of his new LinkedIn profile, cleaned-up Twitter account, and demonstrated the new search engine results for his name. This gave the instructors great feedback on what the students found helpful and what resonated with them. Many students felt they learned a lot from the first day on online privacy and professionalism and already made changes to their online profiles and privacy settings. They also reflected on how small differences in their online presence, presentations, cover letters, and resumes can make a big difference in setting them apart from their peers.

RESULTS

At the conclusion of the week, the students were asked to evaluate the course. They were asked to rate each of these statements:

- 1) The goals and objectives of the course were clearly stated.
- 2) The goals and objectives of the course were achieved.
- 3) The course design was appropriate for the material presented.
- 4) The lectures/presentation were appropriate for the student level.
- 5) Please rate the educational benefit of your final project/paper.

Four of the six students completed the evaluation and answered the first four questions as “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” and the last question as “Good” or “Excellent” (see Appendix 1 Figure 1). There were also four open-ended questions that asked about the quality of instruction, strengths of the course, areas for improvement, and topics that should be covered in more/less detail (see Appendix 1 Table 1).

BEST PRACTICES

Overall, the students reported enjoying both the course’s format and content. Involving the students in many activities and discussions kept them focused and engaged, especially since they’re used to team-based learning from their usual coursework.¹ The students reported in both their evaluations and in their final projects that the first day, “Marketing Yourself Online,” was especially helpful. Students knew far less about social media settings and privacy than we assumed. Several were shocked to find out, for example, how many third-party applications were tracking and/or had access to their personal information. Some had made LinkedIn accounts before but hadn’t updated them in years. Every student was surprised to find the information, social media accounts, and pictures came up when they searched for themselves in search engines. Students also liked the fourth day, “Marketing Yourself In Person,” and enjoyed

practicing public speaking. They were all uncomfortable to some degree with being in front of an audience but they learned strategies for overcoming nervousness in the future.

LESSONS LEARNED

We identified three main areas where we could improve the class or our instruction style. First, one student commented in the evaluation that there could have been less “down time” and they could have done without so many tangents or breaks. We had hoped to create an informal, relaxed atmosphere where the students would feel comfortable sharing their experiences, which does have some risk of the discussion leading to tangents or getting off topic. In the future, we’ll make sure all aspects of each class, including structured activities and discussions, stick to the day’s objectives.

Second, we inadvertently forgot to include materials on designing slideshow presentations in the second day, “Marketing Yourself on a Screen.” We had planned to discuss and evaluate presentations, but when the plan for the day came together, that topic accidentally got dropped. The basics of design still apply to slideshows, and one can create both posters and slideshows in Canva, so students could still apply what they learned to an electronic medium. However, we plan to more explicitly incorporate those topics into the second day in the future.

Lastly, we had provided pre-class readings and audio-visual materials for each class but upon reviewing the student activity in the learning management system, we found that only one student out of the six looked at any of these materials. This could be due to individual differences between the students- perhaps some took the class more seriously than others. We also could have shortened the list of materials to make it appear less intimidating. We plan to re-evaluate the list of pre-class materials in the future to ensure all the content is valuable and to make sure there are no redundancies.

CONCLUSIONS

This project was an immense success. Not only did we improve our teaching skills and gain experience in developing curricular materials, but we also learned more about the course topics as we planned each day’s objectives, lessons, and activities. We also met the three objectives that we had set out at the beginning. First, we became much more involved in the curriculum by becoming an active part of it and teaching an elective course. Second, we made stronger connections to the faculty members who approve ILOs and made new relationships with our six students. Last, we represented librarians and the library in new ways. Before “Marketing You,” our students might have just seen the library as a place with their textbooks on reserve that’s open late, and librarians as people who show them how to search for articles. Now, we’re confident that our students see us as fellow professionals who can assist and guide them in shaping many aspects of their education and careers. We plan to teach “Marketing You” again.

The course syllabus, objectives, and pre-class materials are shared online¹⁰ and we encourage other librarians and institutions to adapt “Marketing You” for their own students.

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APPENDIX 1

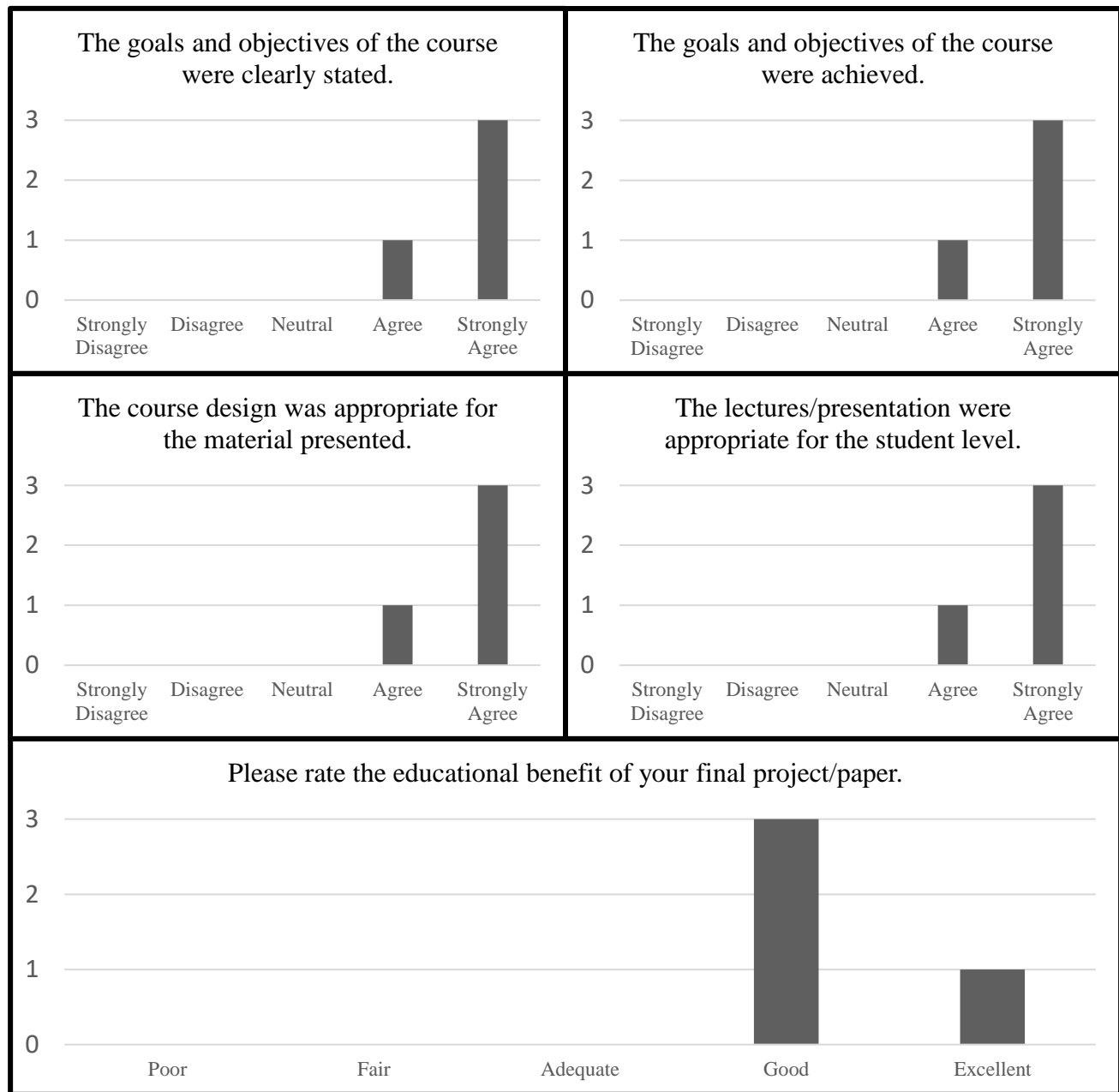


Figure 1: Student answers (n=4) to the post-course evaluation (S.D. for all questions= 0.50).

Question	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4
Please comment on the quality of instruction in this course.	Clear instruction with good, applicable objectives.	This was an absolutely great ILO. It is incredible how much I took away from only a week. All of the preceptors were great. They catered each day to their own strengths and that is what made the class so engaging.	All preceptors did an excellent job in teaching us material each of the sessions. I especially liked the day where we worked on public speaking.	
What were the strengths of the course?	Engaging content. Overall found the course interesting.	The preceptors all brought so much to the class with their expertise.	There was a small group and all the preceptors were extremely helpful.	The course was effectively run and it offered me a new perspective on how to manage my online presence.
What areas could be improved and how would you suggest improving them?	Less down time. Sometimes there was a lot of tangents and breaks.	I cannot think of any.	There was nothing that could have been improved with this module.	
Are there topics you would like to see covered in more/less detail?	No.	Everything was perfect.	The amount of topics covered felt like the right amount and any more would be too much.	

Table 1: Answers to the open-ended questions on the post-course evaluation. Not all students (n=4) chose to answer every question.